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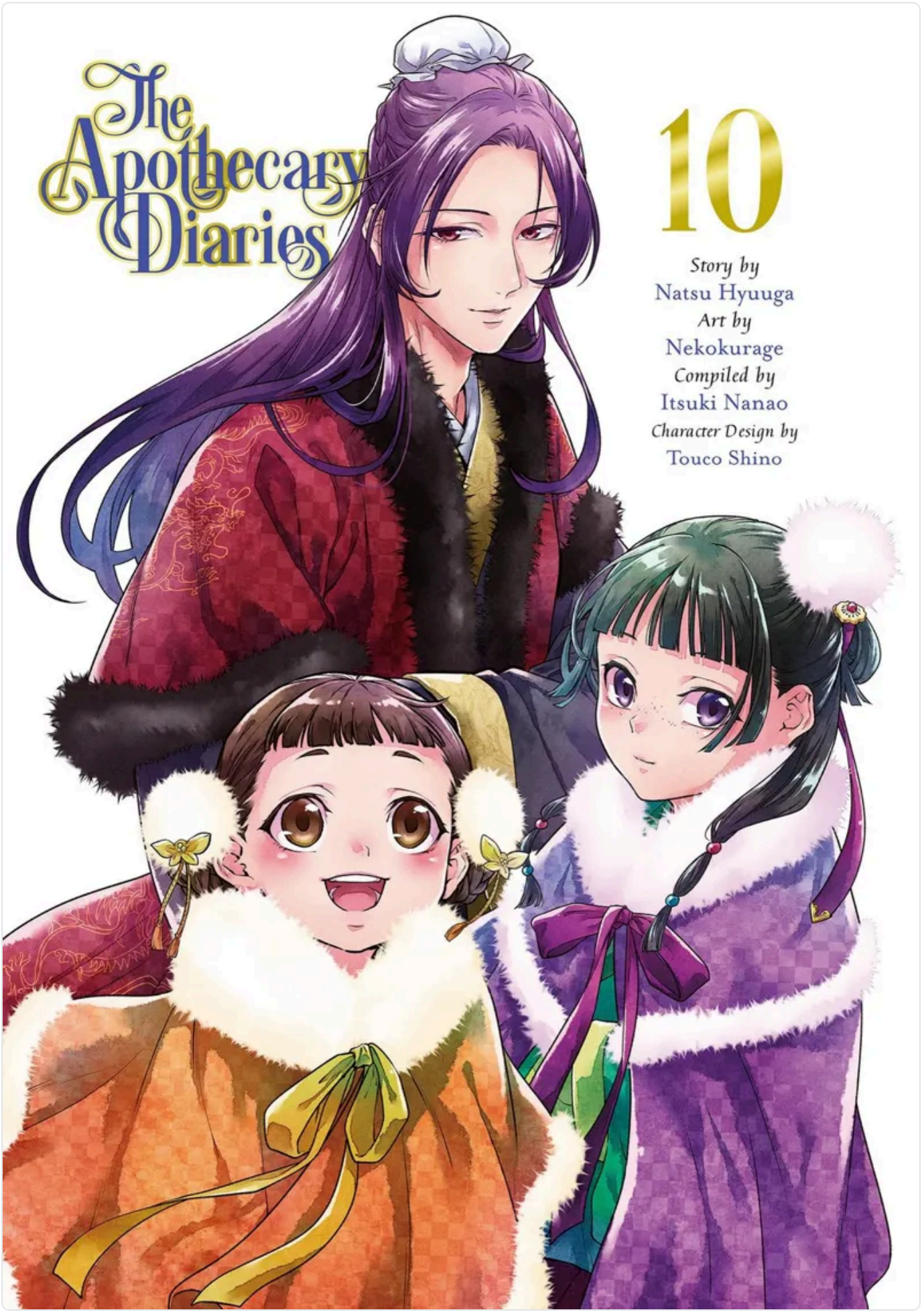
Art by
Nekokurage
Compiled by
Itsuki Nanao
Character Design by
Touco Shino
The Apothecary Diaries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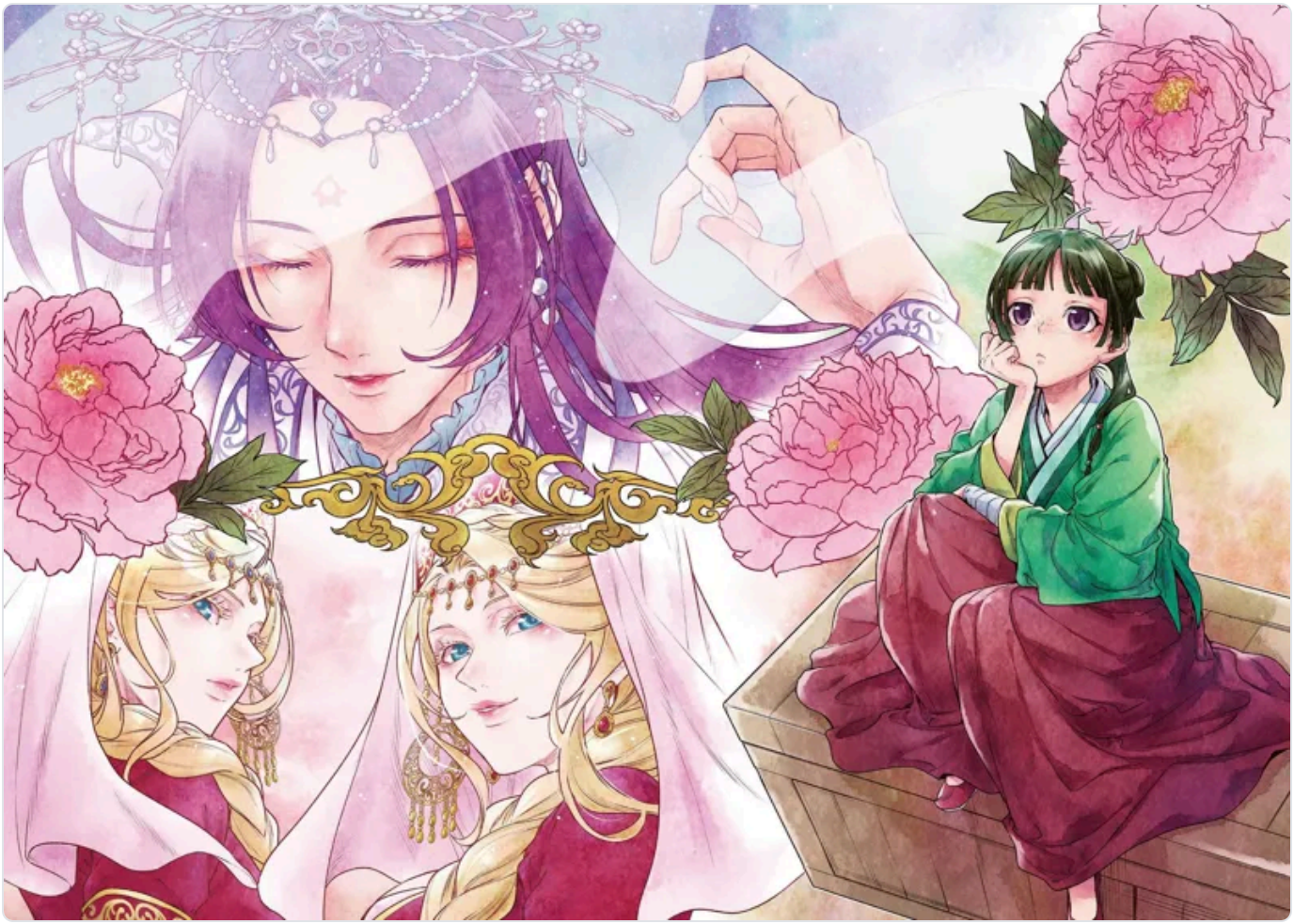

The Apothecary Diaries

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Chapter 48 The Moon Fairy ②

SINCE THE INNER COURT IS ORDINARILY FORBIDDEN TO MEN, SOME WERE OPPOSED TO THIS...
...BUT IN ORDER TO GRANT THE REQUEST OF THE SPECIAL ENVOYS...
...THE RULES WERE TEMPORARILY RELAXED FOR THE EVENT.
FIVE DAYS LATER ...
...IT WAS HASTILY DECIDED THAT THE BANQUET WOULD BE HELD IN THE NORTHERN GROUNDS OF THE INNER COURT.
A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY FROM THE CARRIAGE IN WHICH THE ENVOYS, THE NIGHT'S GUESTS OF HONOR, ARE SEATED...
...STANDS HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY'S OWN.
THE CARRIAGES OF THE FOUR CONSORTS FLANK THEM BOTH.
THESE CONVERTED CARRIAGES WERE PREPARED FOR THE ATTENDEES IN PLACE OF SEATS AT THE BANQUET...
...OUT OF CONSID-ERATION FOR THE INVITED CON-SORTS.
THIS WAY, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO LOWER BAMBOO BLINDS AND KEEP THE FIRES OF THEIR MOSQUITO REPELLENTS BURNING...
...WHILE ALSO HAVING THE FREEDOM TO SIT WITH SOME DEGREE OF COMFORT.

...BUT THEY LOOKED SO ALIKE, THEY WERE PRACTI-CALLY TWINS.
THE TWO GUESTS OF HONOR WERE SAID TO BE COUSINS WHO SHARED A GREAT-GRAND-FATHER...
GIVEN THOSE GOWNS, I'D HAVE TO SAY THE MODIFIED CARRIAGES WERE A GOOD IDEA.
SEEING THEM SIDE BY SIDE LIKE THAT, I'M REMINDED OF GAO SHUN'S STORY ABOUT THE MIRROR IMAGES...

IT SMACKS OF A POLITICAL AGENDA.
TWO BEAUTIFUL FOREIGN ENVOYS COME CALLING ON A DIPLOMATIC MISSION...
...AND PRESENT THEMSELVES TO THE EMPEROR...
THERE'S NO DENYING THAT THEIR BEAUTY RIVALS THAT OF THE FOUR PRINCIPAL CONSORTS.
EVERYONE, FROM THE LADIES-IN-WAITING TO THE OFFICIALS, ARE TERRIBLY CURIOUS ABOUT THE UNFAMILIAR PAIR.
MOREOVER, THEY ALSO HAVE BLUE EYES AND GOLDEN HAIR.
CONSORT GYOKUYO TOO, WITH HER FOREIGN BLOOD, HAS UNIQUE RED HAIR AND GREEN EYES...
...BUT THE ENVOYS WITH THEIR NOVEL TRAITS, THE LIKES OF WHICH HAVE NEVER BEEN SEEN HERE BEFORE, ARE RARER STILL.

PERHAPS THOSE MIRRORS THEY GAVE THE FOUR CONSORTS ...
...WERE AS MUCH PROVOCA-TIONS AS THEY WERE GIFTS.
...BRIMS WITH CONFIDENCE THAT SHE'S THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PERSON HERE.
ABOVE ALL, THE NEARER OF THE TWO LADIES, UNLIKE HER SEEMINGLY DEMURE COUNTER-PART...
JUST AS WE FEARED, A POOR ACTOR WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH TO FOOL THESE TWO.
...HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY'S RECLUSIVE SIBLING WOULD NOT BE IN ATTENDANCE AT THIS EVENING'S FESTIVITIES.
WHILE SISTERS MARRYING BROTHERS WAS, IN TRUTH, NOT TERRIBLY RARE...
...BUT ALSO HIS YOUNGER BROTHER.
THERE WAS SOME SPECULATION THAT THE TWO WOMEN HAD COME TOGETHER TO SEDUCE NOT ONLY THE EMPEROR...

HE'LL BE MISSING OUT. EVERYONE HAS TAKEN PAINS TO MAKE TONIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT GRANDER AND SPLASHIER THAN USUAL...
THE MUSICIANS ARE PLAYING INSTRUMENTS I'VE NEVER EVEN LAID EYES ON BEFORE.
STRINGED INSTRUMENTS LIKE THE PIPA, THE ERHU, AND THE YANGQIN, FLUTES LIKE THE DIZI, AND THE MANY MOUNTED GONGS OF THE PERCUSSIVE YUNLUO...
THEY'VE EVEN GOT SWORD DANCING AND SKITS.
HEH!

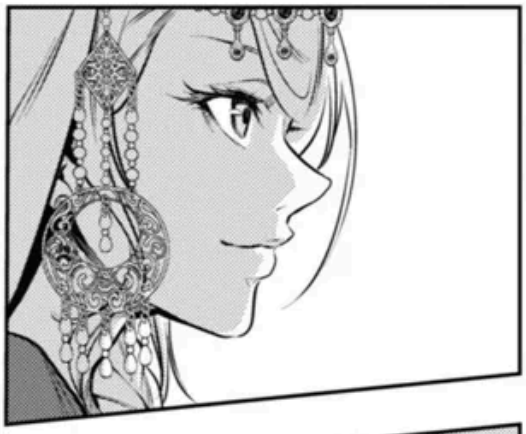
THAT EXPRES-SION...
IS THAT HER WAY OF SAYING SHE EXPECTED MORE?
I SUPPOSE FROM THE BEGINNING ALL SHE HAS CARED ABOUT...
...IS SEEING THE PEERLESS BEAUTY OF WHOM SHE ONCE HEARD HER GREAT-GRAND-FATHER SPEAK.

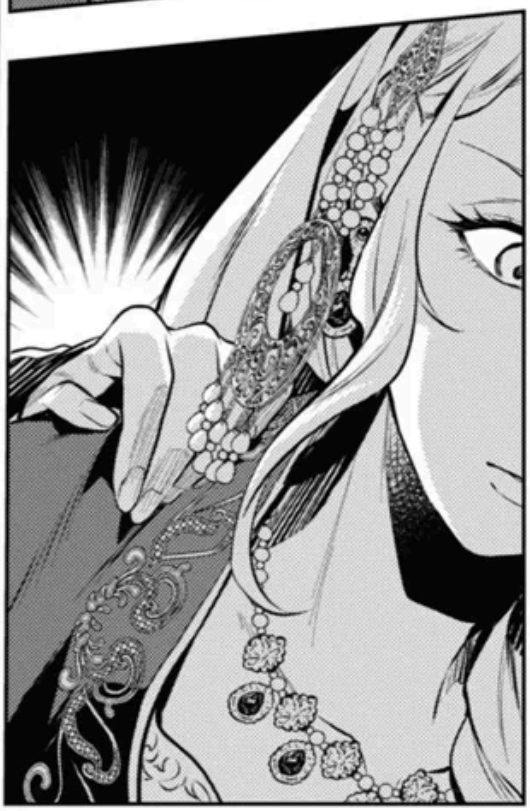
I BID YOU GOOD EVENING, YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY.
HERE WE ARE AT THIS SPLENDID BANQUET...
...ONLY TO BE SEATED SO FAR APART FROM EACH OTHER. IT IS A TERRIBLE SHAME.
I WOULD DEARLY LOVE TO COME CLOSER SO THAT WE MAY TALK.

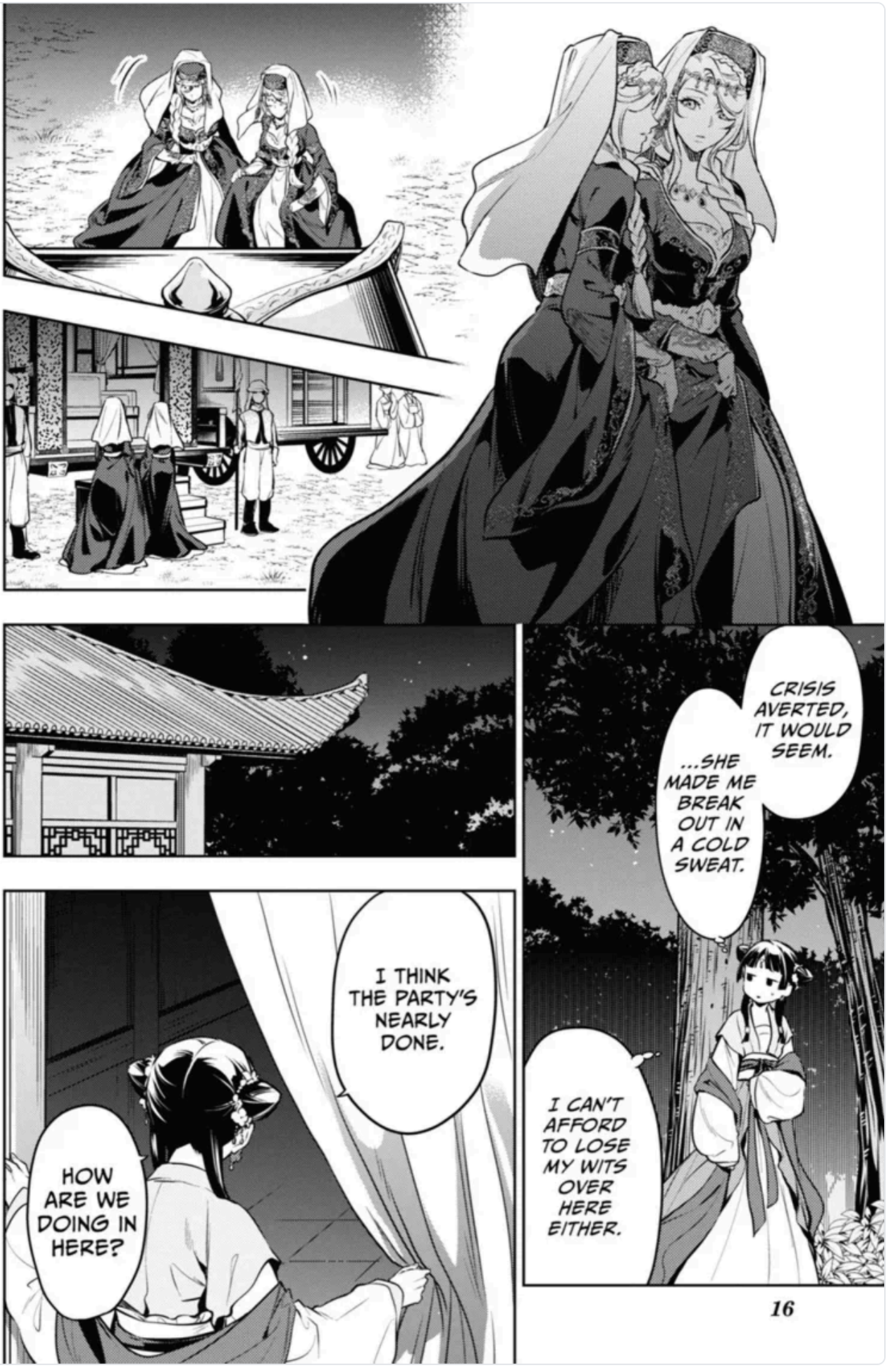
...SHE IS A FORCE TO BE RECK-ONED WITH.
WHOOOA. NOW THAT'S SCARY.
WHAT ARE THIS LADY'S ACTIONS IF NOT AN AFFRONT?
TO SO BRAZENLY APPROACH THE EMPEROR EVEN AS HE IS SUR-ROUNDED BY HIS HIGHEST-RANKING CONSORTS ...

EVEN HONGNIANG OVER THERE, WHO IS SOMEHOW MANAGING TO KEEP HER COOL...
...MUST BE RAGING ON THE INSIDE.
SNAP
SNAP

COME BACK TO THE CARRIAGE, NOW.
THE PERFOR-MANCE IS STILL UNDERWAY.
IT WOULD BE RUDE NOT TO ENJOY IT THROUGH TO ITS END.

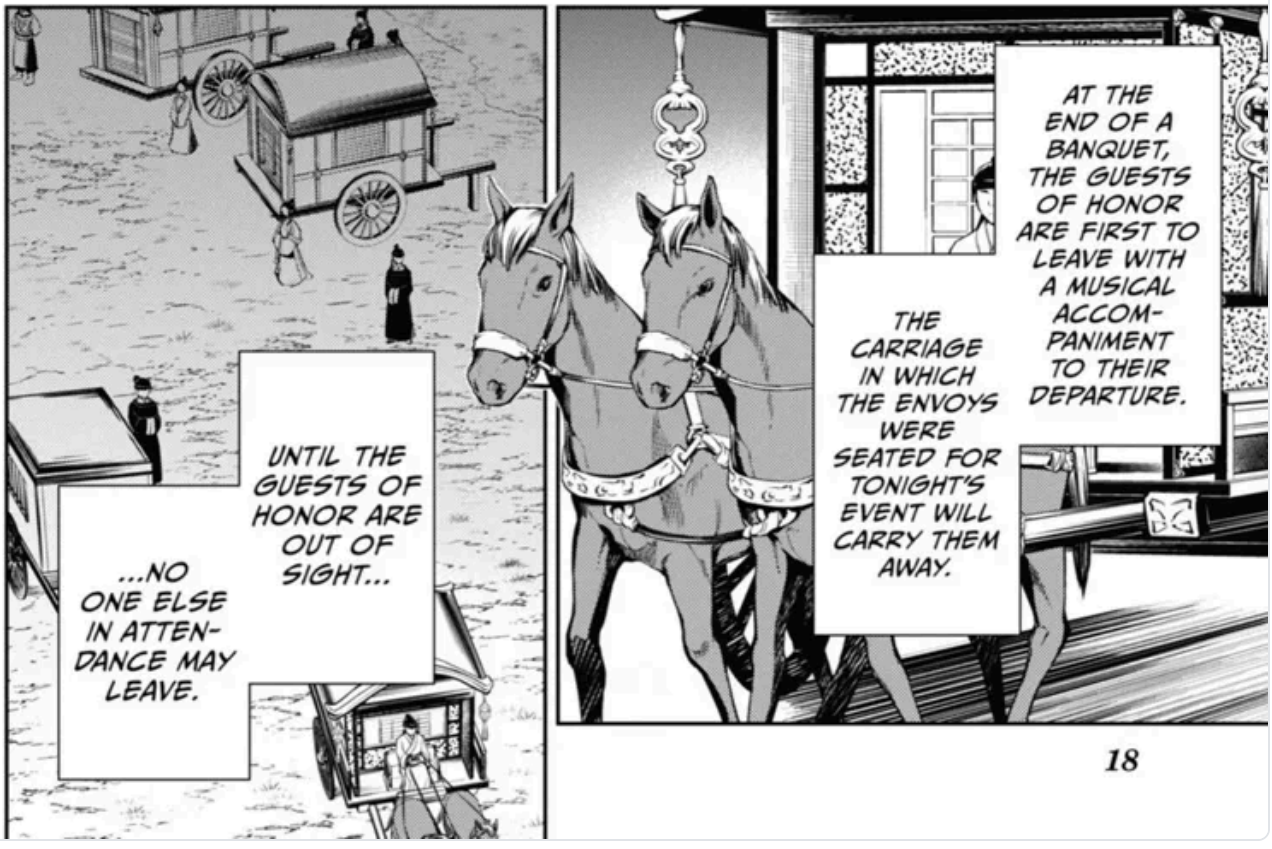





CRISIS AVERTED, IT WOULD SEEM.
...SHE MADE ME BREAK OUT IN A COLD SWEAT.
I CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE MY WITS OVER HERE EITHER.
I THINK THE PARTY'S NEARLY DONE.
HOW ARE WE DOING IN HERE?
16

HOLLOW...
MY WORD.
THAT'S ABOUT THE REACTION I'D EXPECT.
.....IN ANY EVENT...
...I HAVE DONE THE BEST THAT I CAN.
VERY WELL.
SHALL WE BE OFF, THEN?

IT SOUNDS LIKE THE BANQUET'S OVER.
Twang~


AT THE END OF A BANQUET, THE GUESTS OF HONOR ARE FIRST TO LEAVE WITH A MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT TO THEIR DEPARTURE.
THE CARRIAGE IN WHICH THE ENVOYS WERE SEATED FOR TONIGHT'S EVENT WILL CARRY THEM AWAY.
UNTIL THE GUESTS OF HONOR ARE OUT OF SIGHT...
...NO ONE ELSE IN ATTENDANCE MAY LEAVE.
18

THIS SPOT IS BLOCKED BY THE WILLOWS AND CAN'T BE SEEN FROM THE BANQUET.
LET'S WAIT HERE.
THEY'LL BE UPON US ANY MOMENT NOW.
KATUNK
カタン…
KATUNK
カタン
I'M MERELY STANDING HERE AT THE EDGE OF THE PEACH ORCHARD.
BUT I MAY JUST STAND OUT ENOUGH TO DRAW THEIR ATTENTION.
THERE'S NOTHING AMISS ABOUT IT.

NOW!
FWIP

UNDER NAUGHT BUT THE LIGHT OF THE MOON...
...SHE WILL SUDDENLY APPEAR.
ONE LOOK UPON HER, AND YOUR HEART WILL BE SNATCHED UP...
...AND MERCILESSLY TORN OUT.

HUH ?!
TUG
HER VERY BEING LIKE A FATAL POISON.

...WHY, YOU...

28

I'D SAY HE PULLED IT OFF.
I SHOULD'VE FLED AS SOON AS I GOT THE CHANCE.
...AAAND NOW I'M IN TROUBLE.

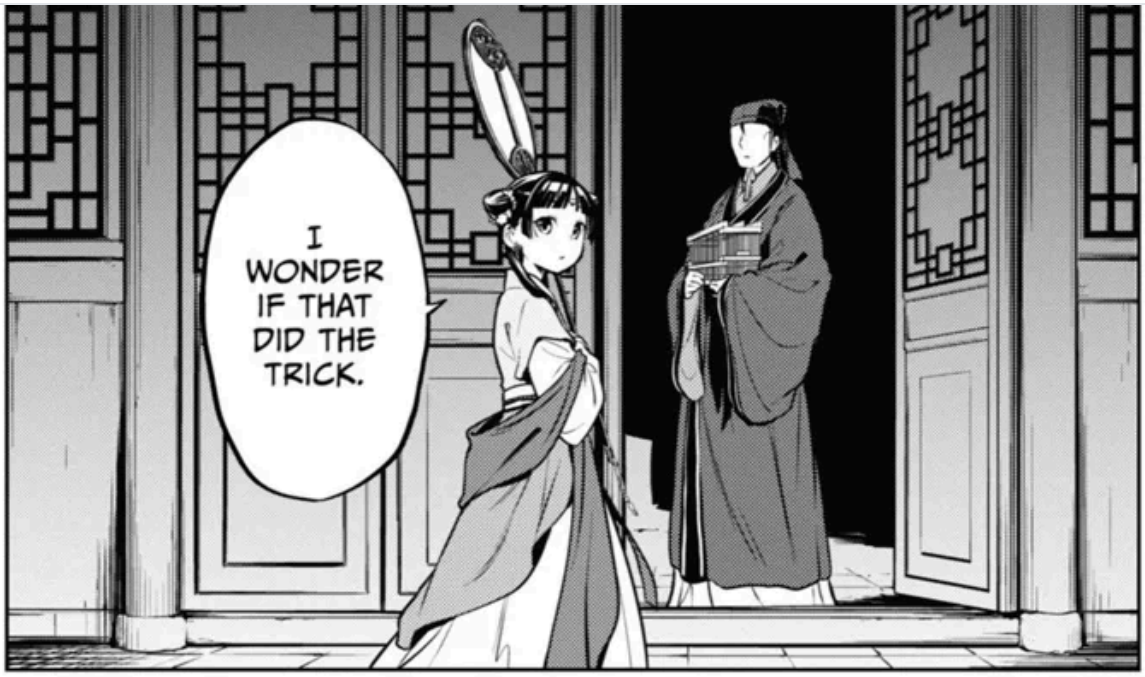
.....SELENE.

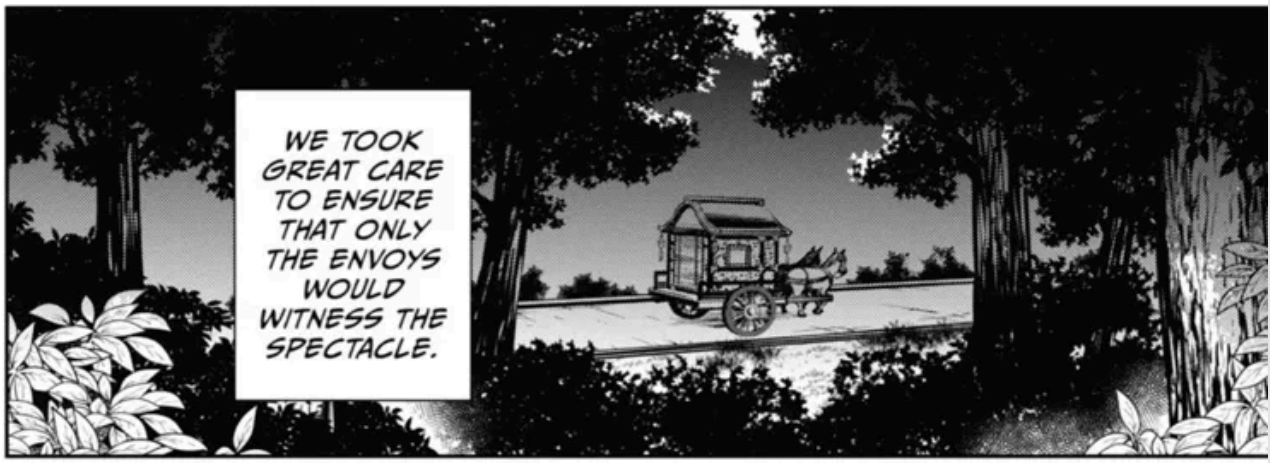
I THINK THAT'S THE NAME OF A GODDESS WORSHIPPED IN THE FAR WEST.
DID THEY GET IT?
BOW
ペコ

IT APPEARS TO HAVE GONE WELL.
YES, I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT.
WE HAD ONLY ONE SHOT AT IT, BUT I THINK THE LIGHTING WAS A COMPLETE SUCCESS!
THE WHOLE THING WAS UNDENIABLY PERFECT, TO BE SURE.

GLIMMR
...WERE THE ADULTS OF THESE MOTHS THAT SHISUI GATHERED.
THE PALE LIGHTS PICTURED IN THE PAINTING OF THE OLD BIDDY...
IT WAS WORTH THE TROUBLE TO COLLECT THESE.
I AGREE.
YOU CAN COLLECT THEM BY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THIS TRAIT.
SOMETHING INSIDE THE INSECTS EMITS AN ODOR TO ATTRACT MATES.
ARGH, HOW ANNOYING!
IF I HAD, TO GUESS, I'D SAY THE STORY BEHIND THE PAINTING IS PROBABLY THAT THE OTHER DANCERS SMEARED DEAD FEMALE MOTHS ALL OVER THE BIDDY'S COSTUME IN THEIR BULLYING ATTEMPT...
...WHICH ATTRACTED THE MALE MOTHS TO HER.
AS SHE TRIED TO BAT THEM AWAY BY THE EDGE OF THE POND...
...SHE MUST'VE APPEARED TO ONLOOKERS LIKE A MYSTICAL BEAUTY LEAVING A TRAIL OF GLIMMERING LIGHTS AS SHE DANCED.

WE GATHERED AS MANY MOTH CHRYSALISES FROM THE ORCHARD AS WE COULD...
...AND THEN I HAD SHISUI IDENTIFY AND SEPARATE THEM OUT BY SEX.
MALE! MALE! FEMALE, MALE!
THESE ARE ALL FEMALE!
TO RECREATE THAT SPECTACLE, I ASKED FOR SHISUI'S HELP.
WHEN I CONSIDER THAT THIS INCIDENT LED TO HER UNSHAKABLE STATUS IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT, ALL I CAN SAY IS...
...COINCIDENCE IS A FEARSOME THING.
ANYWAY, I OWE SHISUI BIG-TIME FOR LENDING ME A HAND WITH THIS.
WE THEN IMBUED OUR BEAUTY'S COSTUME WITH THE SCENT OF THE FEMALE MOTHS...
...AND RELEASED A MULTITUDE OF MALES.
35


I WONDER IF THAT DID THE TRICK.


WE TOOK GREAT CARE TO ENSURE THAT ONLY THE ENVOYS WOULD WITNESS THE SPECTACLE.

GAO SHUN AND HIS MEN WERE ALSO ON STANDBY, READY TO FLY INTO ACTION IN CASE ANYTHING WERE TO GO AWRY.
WE GAVE DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS IN ADVANCE TO THE COACHMAN TO AVERT HIS EYES.

THAT FACE TRULY DOES HAVE THE POWER TO BRING THE COUNTRY TO RUIN.
BEST TO RESERVE IT FOR CERTAIN EYES ONLY.
DRIP THO
DRIP THO
I DID AS YOU ASKED OF ME.

HE REALLY OUTDID HIMSELF THIS TIME.
HE HAD TO CRAWL ALONG THE BOTTOM OF THE POND IN THAT HEAVY COSTUME ALL THE WAY TO THE OPPOSITE BANK.
A FEAT LIKE THAT CAN ONLY BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH AMPLE STRENGTH.
RUB
RUB
HEY!
MY HAIR'S STILL WET!

38

STARE
しー!?
SIGH
THIS GUY... HE ALWAYS GETS THAT LOOK ON HIS FACE WHEN HE'S BEGGING ME TO DO SOME-THING...

40